

DDD Commission Meeting
July 13, 2021 8:00 a.m.
1110 South River Road, The Estuary at the Water Campus

Attending: Melanie Montanaro-Chairwoman, Eric Dexter-Vice Chairman, Jude Melville-Treasurer, Prescott Bailey-Secretary, Erin Monroe-Wesley, Patrick Michaels,

Absent: Scott Hensgens

Others in Attendance: Karron Alford, Mary Jane Marcantel, Mary Durusau, Dr. Pamela Jones, James Taylor, Taylor Jacobsen, Reed Richard, Julia Evans, Tim Boone, Mysti Byrnes, Ed Doyle, Tina Rance, Bill Cress, Melanie Bennett, Caroline Byrne, Rex Cabaniss, Marc Goodson, Ben Blackwell, Darlene Rowland, Mary Jane Marcantel, Nancy Little, Corey Wilson, David Rhymes, Jay Gaudet, Andre Boudreaux, Councilwoman Carolyn Coleman, Justin Lemoine, Chris Chandler, Aaron Mollura, Captain Murial Hall, James Avault, Gabe Vicknair, Casey Tate, Ryan Benton, Ute Cress

1. Ms. Melanie Montanaro called the meeting to order.
2. Ms. Melanie Montanaro declared a quorum.
3. Ms. Erin Monroe-Wesley moved to approve the agenda, Mr. Eric Dexter seconded and the agenda was approved.
4. Ms. Erin Monroe-Wesley moved to approve the June 15, 2021 minutes, Mr. Eric Dexter seconded and the minutes were approved.
5. **Board Action** – None
6. **Governmental Issues** - None
7. **Update from previous Board meeting: Executive Director Transition** - Ms. Melanie Montanaro updated the Board on the Executive Director position. Ms. Melanie Montanaro stated the Commission is waiting on additional information and clarification from the Parish Attorney’s Office in order to proceed to set up a search committee for the Executive Director position.

8. Development Initiatives

A. Developments Underway:

- **Downtown East Housing** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, a map outlaying the housing developments in the Downtown East area and images of the ongoing construction and a proposed bike connection. Mr. Gabe Vicknair updated the Commission on the status of the following housing projects in Downtown East, where there are over 400 units currently under construction:

- a. **Elysian III, North Street** – Construction is close to being completed on the exterior. These are residential apartments under construction, with a total of 42 units. There is a mural on one of the buildings painted by local artist Marc Fresh.
 - b. **Valencia Park, Spanish Town Road** – Construction is currently underway; the development will consist of 110 residential units of which 80% of the units will be Government assisted.
 - c. **Lotus Village, Council on Aging, Spanish Town & 16th Streets** – Construction has started and is at the framing stages. The 116-unit development is a new senior housing development and is aimed at low to moderate income seniors.
- **Water Campus, Water Street** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the completion of Water Street at the railroad tracks, which is ready to be opened pending final approval from the Railroad.
 - **River Center Theatre** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the River Center Theatre currently under construction and near completion. The construction is moving along on course for a September opening.
 - **Rivermark Centre** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the construction at I Rivermark Centre (south tower) which is a mixed-use development with high-end residential units, office and ground-floor retail and an image of a rooftop amenity to be utilized for meetings and events.
 - **The Main Lobby** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, an image of the construction at The Main Lobby on the corner of Main & Seventh Streets. Mr. Gabe Vicknair updated the Commission on the renovation of the building for a restaurant, lounge and rooftop bar. The rooftop will feature an open-air deck with a shade structure with seating for about 28 people. The Main Lobby will have an atmosphere similar to a hotel lobby bar, offering opportunities for quiet business meetings.
- B. University Lakes Restoration Project** – Mark Goodson, CSRS, briefed the Commission on the University Lakes Restoration Project. In 2016, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation sponsored a master plan process that set forth a vision for the University Lakes system. The current planning and design work will engage the public to share their feedback throughout the entire design process on design ideas and for the project. “Our Lakes Fest” is a free event involving the community in the restoration and enhancement of the lakes. The event is being held Sunday, August 8, 2021 from 12:00 PM to 6:00 PM.
- C. Cary Saurage Community Arts Center** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the Cary Saurage Community Arts Center, currently under renovation. Mysti Byrnes, Director

of Public Relations with the Arts Council, updated the Commission on the scheduled opening. The Arts Council staff will be moving into the building in August and the grand opening is scheduled for September 30th from 7:00 PM-10:00 PM. A ribbon cutting will be held at 6:30 PM with Mayor Sharon Weston Broome. Farm Fete, BREADA's annual gala, is being held across the street at the River Center Library on the same date but at a different time, 5:00 PM-8:00 PM. Dual tickets are available on their websites; a shuttle will be available between the two events.

The Arts Council & the Louisiana Division of the Arts are hosting the 2021 Louisiana Arts Summit on September 20-21, 2021 at the Cary Saurage Community Arts Center.

D. Cary Saurage Community Arts Center/Triangle Building Accessibility Issues & Solutions –

Mr. Casey Tate briefed the Commission on the accessibility issues and solutions regarding ADA ramps, sidewalks & curbs, existing tree wells and parking & traffic circulations. The initial priorities are for short term improvements to correct deficiencies such as accessibility improvements, striping and parking improvements, tree trimming and building visibility. The City has committed to repair sidewalks, trim overgrown trees, stripe the streets and fix other deficiencies. Additional work is to install landscaping in front of the building and further develop design for remaining curb extensions. The future phase is to work with Traffic Engineering to develop a flexible pedestrian street on Somerulos Street, traffic flow changes and custom painted crosswalks.

E. Hospitality and Tourism Update – Ms. Karron Alford, Visit Baton Rouge, updated the Commission on the travel and tourism industry for downtown Baton Rouge. Ms. Alford showed the Commission, via PowerPoint, a bar chart displaying the hotel occupancy rates, year to date. They are seeing a 53.6% average occupancy in 2021 compared to 52.3% average occupancy in 2019. Most visitors downtown prior to the pandemic were there for business, 2021 has seen an increase in leisure travel. Average daily rates at the hotels have decreased however, from \$127.25 in 2019 to \$114.19 in 2021.

Ms. Alford stated another riverboat cruise will be stopping in Baton Rouge in the fall, increasing the total to five boats for a total of 44 more dockings in Baton Rouge for the year. The good news is the passengers support our attractions, our restaurants, take downtown tours and the riverboats use our companies to supply their boats.

Downtown should see an increase of visitors with upcoming events such as Marucci Sports World Series, TakeOff North America, Louisiana Municipal Association Annual Conference, festival season and the return of Live After Five.

F. Mayor's Homelessness Prevention Coalition (HPC) – Dr. Pamela Ravare-Jones updated the Commission, via PowerPoint, on the Mayor's Homelessness Prevention Coalition (HPC). Phase two of the Mayor's Homelessness Prevention Coalition's strategic initiative, Behavioral Health Homeless Outreach Team (BH-HOT) will launch the summer of 2021. It a collaboration between

Baton Rouge Police, EBR Sheriff and behavioral health specialists focused on panhandling and homeless encampments. Two teams will go to affected areas to assess individuals to provide assessment, care coordination, and clinical intervention for the homeless.

The Way Home Program, which is a homeless busing program that provides money for bus transportation back to their families, has been very effective. Captain Morel Hall, captain of the downtown BRPD stated this program is the most effective program available in Baton Rouge for helping people get off the street.

G. Outdoor Dining Grant Program – Mr. Ryan Benton briefed the Commission on a \$15,000 Outdoor Dining Grant Program to expand outdoor seating, which will help businesses make up for lost revenue due to the pandemic. This program should launch in the next few weeks after the Parish Attorney reviews and approves the procedures and applications. Businesses are encouraged to take advantage of this program and contact the DDD for help with permitting, location of the tables for ADA requirements and table sizing.

Program Overview:

- Reimbursement of 50% of the cost of approved dining furniture
- Reimbursement of Sidewalk Café application fee and first year permit fees
- Assistance from DDD staff on drafting permit application, including developing required seating layout plans, photos, and other supporting materials
- Maximum grant award of \$1,500, which includes furniture, application, and permit fees

H. 110 Gateway Lighting – Mr. Rex Cabaniss, WHLC Architecture, showed the Commission, via PowerPoint, images of a conceptual lighting design for the area under the I-110 gateway at the two intersections of North Boulevard and Louisiana Avenue. The lighting enhancements will be bright and colorful and will provide safety security lighting for the free public parking area under the gateway. The colored lighting will be able to change based on the holiday seasons, be it Mardi Gras, Christmas or Fourth of July. WHLC & DDD have had numerous meetings with the city Public Works and state DOTD to make sure this project meets their safety and other requirements. Funding for the project is from the Riverfront Gateway Enhancements, \$100,000 is available to light Louisiana Avenue and North Boulevard.

I. Atchafalaya National Heritage Area Grant – Ryan Benton briefed the Commission on a \$12,500 grant awarded to the DDD from the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area on riverfront enhancements for custom-designed signage & seating on the levee and along city dock. The signage will help the passengers from the riverboats & tourists locate downtown attractions and give some history of Baton Rouge, all of which will enhance their visit and experience. This project has matching funds of \$12,500.

J. AARP Challenge Grant - Mr. Ryan Benton briefed the Commission on a \$80,000 grant awarded to the DDD from the AARP Challenge Grant for decorative crosswalks to be located at

five intersections along Third Street from Convention Street to North Street. Decorative crosswalks use distinctive patterns to help define the pedestrian space, make crosswalks more visible and help with traffic calming. The crosswalks are expected to be completed by November, 2021.

K. New Business - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of current projects:

- **American Millennium Project (AMP)** – Mr. Chris Chandler, founder and CEO of AMP, introduced the American Millennium Project, a program that aims to educate area residents on their local history and culture. He is moving the headquarters from Shreveport to downtown Baton Rouge. Its downtown location will not only be corporate headquarters, but also a training facility and eventually a bed and breakfast. There are two major aspects of the project; the first is public tours, all tours have seven stops around different areas of a city. The second part of the project is its student outreach. Students at local middle and high schools can become members of the program and leave class to go on private tours twice a semester.

Mr. Chandler stated the project currently has an agreement with East Baton Rouge Parish Schools. Students at local public and private middle and high schools will have the opportunity to become members in the fall. They are also hoping to have public tours up and running by the end of the month, but that depends on COVID-19 numbers.

9. Events - Mr. Casey Tate updated the Commission on the following downtown events:

- Live After 5 – Line Up announced - August 20 thru November 5
- Bandito Festival – August 21st, City Hall Plaza
- Preserve Louisiana/Old Governor’s Mansion – Self-guided museum tours
- Manship Theatre – Molly Taylor & Denton Hatcher, July 24
- LSU MOA –Form & Fire Ceramics, The Boneyard Ceramics – July 8 – October 17
- Capital Park Museum – Free admission every third Thursday
- Old State Capitol – Two Presidents, One Photographer exhibit – Opening July 13th
- Old State Capitol – Designing a Presidency lecture by Lisa Reynolds, July 15th
- River Center Events – Harlem Globetrotters, August 6th
- LASM – Sunday Stargazing (Planetarium), July 25th
- USS Kidd – Open daily for tours 9:30AM-3:30PM
- Baton Rouge Arts Market, August 7th

10. Ongoing Projects:

- **BREDA** – Ms. Darlene Rowland with BREDA stated that the Farmer’s Market is open every Saturday from 8:00 AM-12:00 PM and Main Street Market is open Monday-Saturday from 7:00 AM-2:00 PM for breakfast and lunch. BREDA is a nonprofit agency which supports and sustains small family farmers; connects the community with

healthy food choices and fosters stewardship of land and community. The Farmer's Market has seen a huge increase of crowds recently.

Farm Fete, BREADA's signature fund raising event, is being held at the Downtown River Center Library's 4th floor terrace on September 30th. This is the same date as the Arts Council grand opening, but at a different time 5:00 PM-8:00 PM. Farm Fete guests will enjoy fresh, seasonal food prepared by local chefs, as well as a live auction featuring farm-themed experiences and items. Farm Fete will also include a virtual silent auction and online event components. Funds raised will benefit BREADA's community outreach programs, for information, visit www.breada.org. Dual tickets are available on the Arts Council website; a shuttle will be available between the two events.

BREADA will be celebrating their 25th anniversary officially in November and will be using social media messaging on Instagram and Facebook showing the impacts of the Farmer's Market through the years.

11. Correspondence: There was no information to report

12. Public Comment – Former Sergeant Kyle Callihan with BRPD welcomed the first National Police Wives Leadership Summit to Baton Rouge from July 14-July 17. They are expecting approximately 50 police officers' spouses. The summit is designed to teach them how to prepare physically and mentally for a life in law enforcement as well as how to organize themselves and their respective departments during times of tragedy/ crisis.

The National Police Wives Association organized a memorial walk for Saturday morning, July 17th from the B-Quick convenience store on Airline Highway to the Baton Rouge Police Department headquarters a mile away. This is to honor the memory of Baton Rouge Police Officers who were ambushed and killed in the line of duty on July 17, 2016 by a lone gunman. The memorial walk is open to the public and starts at 8 a.m. at the B-Quick gas station.

13. Meeting Adjourned – Ms. Erin Monroe-Wesley moved to adjourn the meeting, Mr. Eric Dexter seconded and the meeting was adjourned.